

Winter precautions urged for livestock, poultry owners

DOVER – With winter's official start today, the Delaware Department of Agriculture reminds poultry and livestock growers to take proper precautions to shelter and protect their animals.

"Taking the right preparedness steps is critical to keeping animals safe and protected," said State Veterinarian Dr. Heather Hirst, who heads the Department's Poultry and Animal Health Section. "Winter storm situations can be deadly to livestock and poultry, but a little preparation goes a long way, and never goes to waste."

In preparation for snow and possible power outages, owners should inspect poultry houses and other structures; keep back-up generators, fuel, and filters on hand; check feed inventories; have a back-up communications plan; and mark driveways and roads with tall poles or stakes. Roofs should be cleared of snow as soon as possible, while taking proper steps for worker safety.

Other precautions recommended by the Department of Agriculture include:

>> Check and secure all buildings and enclosures. Repair or secure loose boards, doors, window covers, metal sheeting, wire and equipment that could blow around in high winds.

>> Provide water and food. Make sure your animals have alternate water sources in case power is lost and pumps and automatic waterers are not working. Have enough food and water on hand for seven days. Move feed to higher ground to prevent mold contamination from flooding. In low temperatures, ensure livestock have access to potable water by using floating or sinking stock tank de-icers.

>> Mark animals. Identifiers for returning lost animals could include ear or halter tags, with farm name and phone numbers, brands, paint or Sharpie markings on hooves or coats, or clipped initials in hair coats. Leg bands can be used for back yard poultry.

>> Stock up on supplies. Make sure you have basic veterinary supplies on hand and that your livestock are current on vaccinations.

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